

South Dakota National Guard

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

842nd Family Readiness Group receives national award

By 2nd Lt. Rebecca Linder
SDNG Public Affairs Office

WASHINGTON – September 27, 2011, was the day members of the 842nd Engineer Company were called to deploy. The Soldiers would start their yearlong journey in Afghanistan in support of Operation Enduring Freedom, leaving hundreds of family members, friends and community members behind.

However, loved ones were not in fact left behind as the 842nd Family Readiness Group stepped in to help those temporarily without their loved ones. Volunteers quickly kicked off the program so families could participate in activities and different events that would take place throughout the year.

“The commander called me and asked if I would be interested in taking the position,” said David Burr, 842nd FRG lead volunteer during the deployment. “I was a member of the 842nd for 18 years. I have a lot of strong ties with the unit and I care about the Soldiers and their families, and believe that by being the lead volunteer, I was able to help all of them through a very difficult time in their lives.”

For the exceptional efforts of the program, the 842nd FRG received the 2012 Department of Defense Reserve Family Readiness Award for the National Guard, March 1, at the Pentagon Hall of Heroes in Washington, D.C. Representatives received a commemorative plaque and framed certificate, along with a cash award from the Military Officers Association of America, which is to be used to further enhance the unit’s family support programs.

“This award is really about how the families and the Soldiers handled the deployment,” said David Burr. “There were so many individuals who stepped up at different times through the deployment to help with different things. There is no one individual that made this award possible; but a combined effort of the families and the Soldiers.”

The RFRA recognizes one National Guard and Reserve unit from each of the seven Reserve components with the best programs to support their families. The program was established in 2000 to recognize the top unit Family Readiness program in each Reserve component that demonstrated outstanding family readiness while maintaining superior mission readiness.

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The award nomination was comprised of numerous objectives that the FRG exceeded in order to receive the award. Communication was one of these main objectives, especially since family members of the 842nd were spread throughout the state. Some family members were more than 400 miles from the company headquarters located in Spearfish, S.D.

“One of the ways the 842nd FRG helped develop family readiness was through the Family Readiness Group’s phone tree,” said Lynn Wright, Senior Family Readiness Support Assistant and nominator for the award. “The effectiveness of the phone tree was proven during monthly wellness check calls to family members, helping to ensure their well being, answer questions, identify issues and make referrals to Family Assistance or other resources.”

The phone tree was organized by locations and averaged 12 families per caller. Other ways the FRG communicated to family members was through Facebook and publishing monthly newsletters, which were mailed and emailed to more than 250 families.

Not only did the FRG keep contact electronically and through snail mail, but also provided numerous events throughout the year to increase quality of life and attract family members to activities to learn about programs and services.

Some of the activities included movie night, pizza and pool parties, Halloween, Valentine’s Day and other holiday parties, resiliency training, potlucks, sending care packages, and creating welcome home signs for their deployed loved ones.

“These activities increased attendance, bringing families together and giving them the opportunity to network and share with other families who were experiencing the same hardships as themselves,” said Wright.

Family members of the 842nd were not the only ones who supported the unit throughout their deployment. During the year, the FRG built several relationships with local community organizations such as the American Legion, the local Veterans of Foreign Wars, Spearfish Lyons Club, local girl scouts and church groups.

“The local community was unbelievable and they did so much to support the Soldiers and the family members,” said Burr. “One event that sticks in my mind is when we sent more than 200 care packages for the Soldiers during the Holidays. All the goods in those boxes were donated from community members and businesses from around the area.”

Working together with community members and other family members helped build relationships that still exist even after the 842nd returned home from Afghanistan.

“I saw families and community members working together to help one another and families that didn't know each other at the start are very close friends now,” said Burr. “I really believe that this is wonderful that we have won this award, but I also know the sacrifices that the families and Soldiers made during the last year and I believe that they have truly earned this award.”



130301-A-UV705-006: Army Capt. Matthew Sadler, commander of the South Dakota Army National Guard's 842nd Engineer Company, shakes hands with John Hastings, principal deputy, assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs, while accepting the Department of Defense Reserve Family Readiness Award on behalf of his unit during a ceremony at the Pentagon, March 1, 2013. The 842nd Eng. Co. Family Readiness Group was recognized as the best in the Army National Guard for its work providing support to families of the unit during the unit's deployment to Afghanistan. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. 1st Class Jon Soucy)



The South Dakota Army National Guard's 842nd Engineer Company Family Support Group received the Department of Defense Reserve Family Readiness Award during a ceremony at the Pentagon, March 1, 2013. This plaque, as well as a framed certificate, along with a \$1,000 award from the Military Officers Association of America, which is to be used to further enhance the unit's family support programs, was presented to the unit during the ceremony. (Courtesy Photo)



The South Dakota Army National Guard's 842nd Engineer Company Family Readiness Group received the Department of Defense Reserve Family Readiness Award during a ceremony at the Pentagon, March 1, 2013. Representatives during the ceremony pose for a photo after receiving the award: from left to right, Mr. John T. Hastings, principal deputy, assistant secretary of defense for reserve affairs, Mrs. Sherry Burr, FRG volunteer, Mr. Dave Burr, FRG lead volunteer during 842nd deployment, Capt. Matthew Sadler, current 842nd FRG leader, Mrs. Lynn Wright, senior family readiness support assistant for S.D., Lt. Gen. William Ingram, Director of Army National Guard, Vice Adm. Norb Ryan (ret.), President of the Military Officers Association of America. (Courtesy Photo)

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